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Documenting Fiction – An Interview with Dan Starer, Researcher, “Documentalist”

Dan Starer and Georges Fournier

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Skype interview conducted from the Université Jean Moulin – Lyon 3, on January 13th, 2010.

1 This interview with Mr Dan Starer was prompted by recent research on the porosity between fact and fiction that lies at the core of the dramatic treatment of topical and political issues. How much factuality is the fictional genre endowed with? How reliable is it? What are the incentives for scriptwriters and filmmakers to commit themselves to the revisiting of political events? These were some of the directions that this research took. There remained the question of how to make sense of the past in the absence of readily available material such as diaries, minutes of trials, biographical elements, interviews or testimonials. The necessity of substantiating fiction is made even more complicated when topics are geographically or temporally distant. A prominent figure, one that proves pivotal in such circumstances, is that of the ‘documentalist’ who is called upon to research history and whose expertise in finding documents from the past and making sense of them proves paramount.

2 On either side of the Atlantic, film, television and even literature have witnessed a constant interest among audiences and readers for fact-based narratives.[1] From the inception of television, British scriptwriters and filmmakers have offered viewers fact-laden productions on topical and politically challenging issues. Owing to the widely different situation of television in the USA, their American counterparts have often had to wait for news and current events to become sufficiently removed from the present before treating them fictionally.[2] Conscious of the great impact on the population

afforded by broadcasting, early British filmmakers used it to convey political messages meant to challenge governmental policies, whether in the field of social improvements[3] or of national defence.[4] At about the same time, US TV filmmakers were more politically timid and treated less controversially inspired topics[5] as illustrated by *Brian's Song* (1971), which tangentially dealt with ethnic issues in the 1960s. The end of the 20th century witnessed the revival of the genre, both on TV and among cinematic productions: Tony Blair's premiership gave birth to fact-laden fictions from famous British filmmakers, once again concerning the British foreign policy or the failure of politics to fulfill social and political promises.[6]

3 Whether they deal with contemporary or historical facts, scriptwriters and filmmakers have in mind the substantiation of fiction with unchallengeable evidence that will give their work a journalistic dimension and political import, a concern already expressed by Leslie Woodhead in the 1970s when he declared: "Whenever there is a collision between dramatic values and the obligations of journalism, the latter should always win out."[7] The very same concern for the respect of the actual circumstances in which events occurred, for the exact words and phrases used by the protagonists was observed when, in the wake of the general outcry following the decision by the government of Tony Blair to align the British foreign policy in the Middle-East with that of the USA, several *verbatim* plays were staged in London and in the USA,[8] reviving a dramatic and contentious genre made famous by Joan Littlewood and her Theatre Workshop.

4 The examples mentioned above touch upon specific features of this form of representation which uses fiction to reprocess prominent and controversial news and current events so as to throw light on cover-ups, on neglected aspects of high profile cases or just to fuel the pressure built up by the press. They also testify to an unrelenting need among some scriptwriters and filmmakers to corroborate the controversial viewpoints they put forward with documented evidence. At this stage, the role of documentalists becomes decisive.

5 Although both 'librarian' and 'archivist' are attested lexical items with entries in most dictionaries—which is not the case of the term 'documentalist'—the latter seems to be endowed with generic features, especially when referring to training and teaching courses. As for 'librarian' and 'archivist,' they refer to specific professional activities: librarians and archivists manage the information available, whatever the form, whether paper or digital. Conversely, documentalists search libraries and databases to collect information for future users, hence the implied association with the word "research" and the confusion between "researcher" and 'documentalist.' As regards professional remit, 'documentalists' are called upon when fiction requires to be supplemented with factual elements; their work offers the coherence required by readers and viewers to adhere to fictional worlds by identifying in them elements of the actual world they live in or apprehend through media. Finally, it is the creator who must show skill in choosing the right type of factual information to be used and the right dosage; too much factuality being likely to kill fiction by hampering the suspension of disbelief.

6 A prominent documentalist, Dan Starer makes explicit, right from the beginning of the interview, the link he feels exists between documentation and literature: looking back over his formative years, he remembers his desire to become a novelist. Brought up in Manhattan, Dan Starer holds a B.A. in English from Bowdoin College, Maine–USA, which he complemented with training courses in library and information science and online databases. His career took a decisive turn when John Updike entrusted him with research

for the Rabbit series.[9] Several other novelists have since followed, such as Nelson DeMille, Ed McBain and Mary Higgins Clark. Nevertheless, he owes his reputation as a researcher for fiction writers to Ken Follett, who has regularly commissioned investigations on history, geography and sociology to give factual accuracy to his novels. Dan Starer is also the author of various non-fiction books, *Hot Topics*,[10] *Who to Call?*, [11] and *Five Rings, Six Crises, Seven Dwarfs and 38 Ways to Win an Argument*,[12] to name just a few. A native of New York, where he still lives, Dan Starer often undertakes investigative assignments for the Stock Exchange for which he admits having developed great skill although he confesses to a preference for the documentation of fiction.

7 This interview, for which Mr Dan Starer kindly accepted to give some of his time, has provided vital information on how these professionals operate. What training do they have? What are the different types of tools they use? What impact has the Internet had on their work? What are their fields of research? It also gave Mr Starer the opportunity to lay emphasis on the conflict between personal fulfillment and financial imperatives. Thought-provoking answers were offered on how fiction is substantiated, on how participants in a fictional project envisage both their role and the resulting material. Finally, it has inspired further investigation into the varied forms of collaboration between researchers and writers.

8 I would like this introduction to be the opportunity for me to thank Mr Dan Starer for having agreed to a printed version of this interview, thus affording readers an insight into the documentation of fiction.

Georges Fournier: How did your interest about documenting fiction come about? Were you originally working in the field?

Dan Starer: No, not exactly. It all started when I was in high school, when I was about sixteen years old and I knew a writer who lived in Upstate New York. This is long before the time of online database researching and long before the Internet.[13] She lived in Upstate New York and did not have access to good libraries. I grew up in Manhattan and I have spent all my life here. I was kind of an intellectual bookish child so that I knew New York City libraries quite well. I knew that she needed some information on some things, so I actually did a little research for her. It was just a onetime thing but it sort of stuck at the back of my mind for years. After I had finished university, I was interested in actually being a writer, I was interested in writing fiction. I was a teacher for a little while and then I decided to start this business. It was not really an existing field that I was aware of at the time, though I knew that this need possibly existed among writers who did not have access to good libraries. I also decided to start this business as a way of making connections in the publishing industry and then presumably writing my own novels and getting them published. But, as it turned out, I found that I was rather good at doing research and I very much enjoyed it and I was not so good at writing fiction and did not enjoy it so much, so it became my career.

G.F.: How did you start?

D.S.: I have always enjoyed reading history. I started writing some letters to some authors, you know: "Here I am, I am in New York, I am a university graduate and I can help you with your research". It was before the days of so-called word-processors, the early days of computers. I wrote a lot of letters and, as it turned out, my first client was John Updike, so I thought that was a good start but it took many years, it slowly built up. Specifically, John Updike wrote a number of novels called the Rabbit series: his main character was nicknamed "Rabbit" and he had a fictional career as a car salesman

and Mr. Updike needed to know what a car salesman does, what his daily life is like, the technicalities of running that business and what it felt like to do that profession and that is what I researched, strictly my first research, the first research of my new business.

G.F.: I suppose that you didn't know much about this topic yourself?

D.S.: No, I knew nothing about this topic. What I knew was how to find information efficiently and I think that's a separate skill. You know there are certain topics that I will not research because I feel it requires an expert to do it, very highly technical and scientific topics for example, or researching the law or genealogy. That sort of thing has to be done by specialists. But my feeling is that for most other topics if you are an expert at finding information, if you have a good sense for evaluating information and trying to really solve a client's problems and answer his questions, then I think that is a valuable skill and that is what I do. I am sometimes asked to do things that I simply have no desire to research, I mean I am occasionally approached by someone who is on a different ... who has very different political leanings than I have and I am not interested in finding, supporting information for their points of view. So I will decline to do research occasionally, when a situation like that happens.

G.F.: Was researching a hobby initially?

D.S.: No, it was an attempt at making a living and I wanted to do something different and do something entrepreneurial, I guess, and I also went to a school for library science for a little while, when online databases started becoming available.[14] The biggest online database company was called Dialog[15] and in the old days, you know, the speed of information transmission was 300 baud,[16] which was terribly slow. You could actually see the black and white letters slowly coming across your screen and I knew that this was going to be the future of research. So I went to a library science school and also to Dialog and took courses in online research database searching.

G.F: How do you begin researching topics?

D.S.: Originally, I would start with library research. You have to know something about the topic before you approach an expert because you do not want to waste the expert's time, whether they are talking to you out of the kindness of the heart or whether you pay them to talk to you. Either way, you do not want to waste their time. Further, I have a sort of, a system which I use: I start almost all research topic with online research and then probably will follow it with library research for certain material that may not be available online and, once I have really narrowed down a set of questions, sometimes with consultation with my client, only then will I approach an expert.

G.F.: So, your very first step is online research.

D.S.: It really depends on the topic of course, but what is really important is the order. What I usually like to do is online research followed by library research followed by talking to experts, if it is necessary to talk to experts. I do not need to contact experts for many of the topics; it really depends on what the topic is and how in-depth the client needs information. I first search the web and online databases. The web has wonderful value but there is also a lot of junk on the web, as you all know. Depending on the research, I will avoid what is on the web and go more towards more bibliographic databases or full text databases from well-known publications and well-known databases and find information there which is more reliable, in my opinion. It also depends on the nature of the research. For example I have done a lot of research

for best-selling novelist Ken Follett and sometimes I would talk to experts while I did research for him, but once again it is later in the research process. Ken Follett wrote a book which involves earthquakes in California and I found a lot of published information on the topic that he wanted and he digested that and then wrote a first draft of his novel. Then I found a couple of experts who were top professionals, seismologists, who were earthquake experts in California, and we then hired those people to read the first draft of Mr Follett's book, the sections that involved earthquakes actually, and then they provided a written report saying if there was any problem, whether there was anything that required authentication or improvement from a technological, professional point of view.

G.F.: Did your researching business take off with the Internet?

D.S.: It took a while, it took a number of years and it is still difficult sometimes. The Internet has made it very easy for people to find information obviously, and people can do a lot of the easier research topics on their own, they do not need a library. Many things became much easier to research, so I lost clients as a result of the Internet. So I would not say that it took off necessarily, it just became different.

G.F.: Are your clients from specific fields-fiction, science, etc.?

D.S.: Both. And I don't limit myself. I also do some work for screenwriters, I also do some work for business people. It's not as much fun doing business research but it also helps pay the bills.

G.F.: Are there topics which are harder for you to research?

D.S.: Yes, of course. Generally speaking when you are doing historical research, the further back in time you go the more difficult the research is, simply because less is written about these things. I mean, a lot has been written about Ancient Rome, for example, but if you are asked to research, you know, 11th century France or things like that and, like me, you do not speak French or read French, it becomes more of a problem. And also, among more difficult topics, is the research I do for writers who write books about terrorism, who write thrillers and these books very often involve information on organisations, intelligence organisations, special forces, you know, the ones who go in and rescue people who have been captured and I am asked for very detailed information on how these organisations work and how they are organised and obviously they are top secret organisations. Not that much reliable information is published about them, so information like that can be difficult to find.

G.F.: Do you find that type of information on the Internet?

D.S.: Yes. I mean, you find it on the Internet, but you also have got to be careful what you are looking at. Anybody can publish anything on the Internet and, once again, I try to rely more on sources that have been published by legitimate publishers, you know, known magazines, known newspapers, and books that have been published by real publishers, not self-published.

G.F.: Do you also work for journalists?

D.S.: I have worked for journalists who were writing books. I am never hired by a journalist who is doing an article because the economics of that doesn't make sense, from their point of view. Occasionally, a journalist is writing a very in-depth book and he needs some additional research. They really want me … they want me to research sources they do not have access to.

G.F.: How far do you go into researching a topic and when do you stop researching?

D.S.: An important part of that would be their budget. Many people have a set budget and I have to find the best information I can within that budget so that is the most important self-limiting factor. I have just been doing this for thirty years and I have a very good sense of what my clients need when I talk to them. I do it on a phased basis very often: I will give them a first batch of information and let them digest that and then see how they feel and they will give me feedback, you know "Topic A is done I think, I have enough there but topics B and C, I need a little bit more depth of information and here specifically is where I'd like some more information." So sometimes it works that way but sometimes I just give them everything in one big batch. I just have a sense for it; I have a sense of how important the information is for them. I ask them questions like, "Is this information, you know, absolutely central to your book or is it just, you know, one chapter?," "Is it for a main character or is it for a subsidiary character in the book?," "Is it for the main setting or for a subsidiary setting?" Then I think you really have common sense ... you really have an understanding of when they have enough.

G.F.: What is the longest period of time you have spent on researching a topic?

D.S.: A specific project? Say about a month, yes.

G.F.: Which means ... how many hours?

D.S.: Forty hours a week. Most projects are much smaller than that.

G.F.: Regarding your work with Ken Follett, can you tell us what kind of information he was looking for?

D.S.: It really depends. I have done research for a lot of his books in the last thirty years. It really depends on the nature of the book that he is writing. There are some topics that are very new to him and he needs a lot more information than others. He has written quite a bit on European history. So when he is doing research on World War Two, for example—he already has a substantial library on World War Two topics and knows a great deal himself—the topic becomes much more specific. On the other hand, when he is researching a place that he does not know, for example Buffalo, New York —he is not an American and he does not travel to Buffalo regularly—there's no need really for him to know much about that. Then he needs very broad information when he is writing on Buffalo, New York, in a certain year: he needs to know what the place looked like so he needs maps from the time, photographs from the time, video that is available, descriptions of various institutions, the news stories, what was going on that year or that month, or that week depending on how specific the story goes, so that he can be authentic in writing about that place at that time.

G.F: How far do you rely on the information provided by fiction?

D.S.: I am occasionally asked for novels in addition to non-fiction information about certain topics, but I would never start with it. Many writers are scared of copying somebody, either intentionally or inadvertently, you know, no writer wants to be caught plagiarising which is a very serious sin in publishing and in academics, of course. So the writers are funny about this: some of them will actually read other novels on a similar topic and some of them will be a little bit scared to do that, they do not want to... they want to be original. They want to make up their own characters, their own milieu, their own world, and not even have their subconscious affected too

much by what other people have done. The majority of them probably do read a lot of fiction on that time because they are just curious.

G.F.: Is being a professional from a specific field, rather than a general researcher, an advantage in terms of providing information? Is the approach different?

D.S.: Yes, it is different. Some of my clients are specifically interested in interviewing experts on a topic and they ask me to find someone for them to interview. I mean, I have done research for an American crime novelist, a mystery novelist, and she is writing a book set in a certain city about thirty years ago. The main characters are police officers and my job is to find police officers who are now retired and who worked in that city as police at that time and I will set up interviews. I will never meet these people, it will all be done over the phone and I will set up interviews between them and her. I am already finding a lot of published information on that city in that year and information about the police department and its organisation. Once she has absorbed all that information, she will have a more specific set of questions for her to ask people who actually were police. I will set up these interviews and she will talk to them and that will probably be the end of the project, that will probably be as far as you can go.

G.F.: Have you ever been asked to investigate the same topic twice and were you able to reuse the information you collected the first time?

D.S.: Yes and no. When I do research for a client, they own it, it is theirs. In answer to the first part of your question, I have been asked for the same thing more than once. There are a couple of things I am asked for regularly. The thing I am asked most often is the workings and the daily life of the New York City police detectives. The crime genre is very popular in the United States and New York in particular creates a lot of interest. I have worked for some very famous crime writers in the US, Laurence Sanders, Evan Hunter—also known as Ed McBain—who wrote fifty novels on New York City police before he died. I did a lot of research for him. I have developed contacts in the New York City police department and I know some people to talk to and I do get requests from other writers on this topic. I do not keep photocopies that I have already made that answer the generic questions on this topic because all the copies that I made for prior clients belong to prior clients and it is out the door. However, since I have been down this road a number of times, I can be very efficient in researching, so I know exactly where to go to answer the new questions about New York City police detectives.

G.F.: How can you use information collected during previous projects?

D.S.: The questions are always a little bit different, I mean, every writer has a different scenario for their story, I mean there are some things that I can answer off the top of my head, a few simple questions but most of what they want is published information on the topic. They want really very detailed information and that changes all the time. The New York City police department evolves, changes and new things are published and older things become obsolete, so when I do the research on this topic the next time I am very efficient because, as I said, I know exactly where to look for information. But I will find them the current version of it, the current publications that answer their questions, or I will talk to someone at the New York police department who will answer their specific set of questions based on the current circumstances, as they are at the present day.

G.F.: Do you keep a record of the work you do and update the information you have?

D.S.: I do not keep the files that I then hand on to other clients. I do have big files of what I have done, but then they are very rarely useful for future clients and I just keep them as it is interesting for me. I research things anew.

G.F.: From your point of view, to what extent does fiction need to be documented?

D.S.: The story has to come first and I think that the research is very important and adds a lot but if people wanted to read history they would buy the non-fiction history books. If people want to read fiction they need to have a strong story and read that. But you know, it really works both ways and if the research is not correct it may kill a book. If you read book reviews–you know, most newspapers and magazines will hire a reviewer who has some knowledge of the topic that the author's book is about—and if they come up in the first paragraph of the review and say the authors did not do their homework, it will kill the book, even if it is a best-selling author. If the reader feels that the author does not take the trouble to do his homework, why should the reader buy the book? At the other end of the spectrum, if an author doesn't have a really good story to tell that keeps the story moving and if he or she gets bogged down in endless and unnecessary details that don't move the story forward, then I think that is also going to be critiqued by reviewers and present a problem. I think the author has to find his own balance. Language is also important but not every author wants to do that. It really depends on what the authors want to do and what is their perception of what the market will be interested in. If you want to write a historical novel and you want it to appear very old fashioned in all aspects, including the language, then that becomes a difficulty for the reader. I think that is really the authors' decision that comes almost after they have finished with my assistance. So I think the authors have to find their own balance.

G.F.: How different is working for cinema and television compared to working for literature?

D.S.: It is pretty much the same because I am doing research for writers and screenwriters, and they want as much detail as I can find on their topic to make it real for their readers or for their viewers. I do not think there is a really big difference there at all.

G.F.: Are you often approached to confirm rather than research information?

D.S.: Both. I am almost always hired to do the research myself. Occasionally people will call me up and ask for advice, people who cannot, you know, hire a researcher, then they will ask for advice, "How do you find the information on this and that?" Then I will just be nice to them and offer them my experience, but I am almost always hired to do the actual research.

G.F.: Are there fields which require more technical details, such as crime stories which need to be more accurately documented due to the public's being so familiar with this genre?

D.S.: I think so. People are fascinated by the genre and there is a whole genre in the US of what we call the police procedural and people are actually fascinated by this, I mean forensics, for example. Criminal forensics series are terribly popular in the US. I mean, if you watch … if you turn on the evening television shows, there is *CSI*,[17] which I worked for. It is a crime scene investigation series; it is a very popular series of television shows that take place in different cities, *CSI Miami*, *CSI New York*, *CSI Las Vegas*. And there is also a TV show called *Bones*. I mean there are endless TV shows finding dead bodies and figuring out who did it, because of the science involved. So, for this

genre, the technology and procedures are almost central to the story and to what the audience is interested in.

G.F.: Are there kinds of research that you find frustrating because overly technical or because you do not have enough time? Are there fields you stay away from?

D.S.: Yes, to all of that. Sometimes the budget is just not realistic for what they are looking for and I will tell them upfront. I will tell them that I will do what I can but this is not really enough, and they will do what they can with that. And sometimes it is just extremely difficult to research and there is not published information on some things, especially in the world of secret intelligence organisations and things like that. They understand that they are dealing with those kinds of limitations. If they are fiction-writers, the advantage is that they can make it up: they will take all the facts that are available and then fill in the blanks and write what they want to write. The only people who can tell them that they are wrong would be secret agents and intelligence officers working in that field, and they are not going to come out and complain that the book was not accurate.

G.F.: What would you compare your work to? Detective investigation, journalism, ghost-writing?

D.S.: I would not compare it to ghost-writing. I do not do ghost-writing. I would say that it is part detective, part journalist and part librarian; it is a fair part of what I do. It is sometimes ... the part of being a detective is tracking down people. There is a story and once again it is about Ken Follett. Ken Follett wrote only one non-fiction book and it was called *On Wings of Eagles*.[18] It is a book ... it is before the Shah of Iran fell in 1979. Things were already going very badly. There was much anti-American sentiment in Tehran at the time. The Iranian government was essentially ... their computers were essentially being run by an American company called EDS, which is based in Dallas and the president of that company, H. Ross Perot, who was well-known in the US back then —he is a billionaire and he actually ran for president later[19]–had a number of his employees who ran the computers in Iran, taken prisoners in 1979, and they ended up in one of Tehran's terrible prisons. And there was no government in control at the time that one could talk to, to try to get them out. So, H. Ross Perot hired a retired American soldier, colonel Bull Simons was his name, and he tried and get these fellows out of the Iranian prison and, to make a long story short, they created a sort of fake riot outside the prison and a big diversion and they sent a bunch of mercenaries into the prison and got these Americans out and successfully got them out of Iran. Ken Follett wrote a very good non-fiction book on this topic and I did a lot of research for one of the projects that was very important: there was an American citizen who was in Tehran at the time and he had acted in ways that might be considered treasonous. He acted in ways which were very much not in the interest of the US because he was getting paid by somebody to do it and Ken Follett wanted to interview this man who was very important. This man did not want to be found: he had since changed his life, he had changed careers, he had left Iran and moved back to the US. It took a long time but this is where being a detective, as part of my job, became important. I kept working at it and I finally found this guy—he is now working in the USA. No one knew about his past or what he had done and I got him on the phone and I could just hear his heart sink. I wanted to talk to him because I knew what he had done in the past and I told him I was not going to blackmail him or anything like that. I just wanted him to talk to Ken Follett to authenticate some information and I said that his name would never be used, we would

not divulge his new life, his new world and he could remain safe. But would he be willing just to talk to Ken Follett and help authenticate some things, so that Ken's non-fiction book would be correct? He agreed to that, he had no problem with that, they talked and I never told anyone who he was, what he had done or anything like that, so that it was like being a real detective to find this, and that is a long answer but ...

G.F.: Do you work in teams or individually?

D.S.: I do not delegate very much research to be honest with you, for a couple of reasons. I think one of the reasons that my clients hire me is—and I am not trying to brag here and I am just trying to tell you what I believe is the truth—my clients are best-selling authors, their next book is very important to them. It is also very secret to them; they do not want the world knowing what they are doing necessarily, maybe in vague terms but not in specific terms. They are interested in having a researcher that they know and that they can trust and who can also understand what their needs are specifically because, you know, different authors, different specificities, different requirements. So one thing I might do is—if I have a specific list of articles, or something like that, that looks particularly good, that is not available online, which can happen—I may have someone else go to the library simply to do the mechanical work of making the photocopies. But most of the research I do myself because my clients want me to; they want to know that the person they have given this request to is the person who does it. They know me, they have some trust in my judgment in not only finding what is true and what is real but also in deciding, among the very large mass of information that can exist on a certain topic, that the information that I choose is the best and will best help to answer their questions.

G.F.: Your worst memory or experience as a researcher?

D.S.: Worst experience or disappointment ... you know writers are creative people and sometimes a writer will write half a book and all of a sudden say: "I've lost this book because the characters aren't working for me" or "The story isn't working for me" or "Somebody else has published a book on this exact topic and my publisher has not told me" or even "You know, the interest in this topic is not so great and..." It is very disappointing to see that I have spent a block of time, the paperwork, you know ... I am doing this work and ... you know ... it's not to work out.

G.F.: Are you sometimes disappointed by the way the information you provided was used?

D.S.: I do not think that happens too often. I think that there is a lot of intellectual honesty among writers and it is a sign of professionalism, it's a sign of quality, but I do not think that people misuse things or decide not to use things. In fiction you can to some extent, you know, you are writing a story, you are making it up, so if the facts are inconvenient or do not really serve your story, there are some writers who will ignore some facts but they will very often write a little foreword at the beginning of the book admitting to doing so, probably for their own benefit, so that some critic doesn't slap them for having done so. But that doesn't happen very often. I do not think that there have been too many disappointments. Occasionally some topics can be very boring, I'll admit to that. That is more often when I am doing research for business people, you know, doing statistical research for business people. I could probably make more money doing business research all the time, but I would cheat myself. There is demand. I mean, I live in New York and you know Wall Street is always interested in information of one kind or another. I tell you what: there are many companies in the US that do

nothing but research on stocks; they do predictions for trends, predictions for products that will be popular and things like that. They do a lot of primary research. I am sometimes hired to do secondary research, which means companies will say, you know, "We are thinking of coming out with this new product. Tell us what is going on in this area, it's not an area we are familiar with", "What is being made here?", "What products are going to come to market?", "What is the market for a product like this?" Theoretically, it is not something that I do very often, you know, it is something that I have some skill at and I get hired to do it, but it is dull and I would much rather be researching twelfth century London.

G.F.: What is the research you are most satisfied with?

D.S.: I do not know if it is a specific thing, but one thing that I love doing is see my clients' books be published and then reading reviews in important publications, like *The New York Times*, and when the reviewer gushes over how authentic it seems, and how good the guy is, and you know, "This guy did his research ..." That makes me feel good to know that it made a difference to their book.

NOTES

1. While, in the 20th century, the USA witnessed the expansion of narrative forms of journalism with writers like Norman Mailer and Truman Capote, for instance, the United-Kingdom largely benefited from the unparalleled influence of the BBC, which spawned generations of committed filmmakers using fiction to get their political messages across, from Ken Loach to Peter Kosminsky.

2. Owing to the unrivalled influence of Hollywood, the US television has often been pressured into being purely entertaining, as proved by the thinly-disguised criticism that follows: "The Council cannot, and does not wish to deprive television of this art form which has given rise to great plays, novels and movies. Nor is the Council in a position, since it deals only with journalism, to pass judgement. [...] Nevertheless, the Council expresses its concern and urges that the television networks take this matter under serious consideration, going beyond mere routine disclaimers, to assure a proper regard for factual and historical accuracy." Tom W. Hoffer and Richard Alan Nelson, "Docudrama on American Television," in *Why docudrama?: Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, ed. Alan Rosenthal (Carbondale, Edwardsville, Il: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999) 64-77.

3. *Cathy Come Home* (1966), by Ken Loach, highlighted the defects and limitations of the Welfare State.

4. *The War Game* (1965), by Peter Watkins, dramatised the criticism levelled at the then government for contemplating the use of nuclear weapons.

5. "The American system has always dominated economically, the British system being regarded as a model for responsible, non-commercial broadcasting." Derek Paget, *No Other Way to Tell It* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) 141.

6. Among the most prominent productions were *Warriors* (Peter Kosminsky, 1999), *The Project* (Peter Kosminsky, 2002), *The Deal* (Stephen Frears, 2003) and *It's a Free World* (Ken Loach, 2007).

7. Derek Paget, *No Other Way to Tell It, op. cit.,* 197.

8. We can mention, among other plays: *Called to Account* (2002), *Stuff Happens* (2004), *Embedded* (2004) and *What I Heard About Iraq* (2004).

9. "John Updike published *Rabbit, Run*, the first of his four novels about Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, in 1960. *Rabbit Redux*, the second installment in the series came out in the fall of 1971. The third and fourth installments, *Rabbit Is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest*, followed in 1981 and 1990, respectively. [...] Each Rabbit novel is cast in the present tense and is set in the year or so just prior to its publication date. [...] This tidy, decade-by-decade structure has served as one of the tetralogy's most popular features: fans of the series can check their own experiences against that of Updikes's gruff, hard-hearted Toyota salesman. In this regard, the Rabbit novels serve as a fictionalized time line of the postwar American experience." Marshall Boswell, *John Updike's Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2001) 253.

10. Daniel Starer, *Hot Topics: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the Fifty Major Controversies Everyone Pretends to Know All About* (New York, NY: Quill, 1995) 269.

11. Daniel Starer, *Who to Call?* (New York, NY: Quill, 1992) 654.

12. John Boswell and Daniel Starer, *Five Rings, Six Crises, Seven Dwarfs and 38 Ways to Win an Argument* (New York, NY: Galahad Books, 1997) 241.

13. "The time of online database researching [...] the Internet" refers to the 1990s. For further information, see Harris M. Cooper, Larry V. Hedges and Jeff C. Valentine, *The Handbook of Research Synthesis and Meta-Analysis* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009) 75.

14. "By the late 1970, publishers were creating electronic databases of citations used as the basis for their published indexes and abstracts; a few even made searching of these databases available for a fee. But these electronic databases were searched remotely by experienced searchers, who accessed reference databases through a vendor aggregator (a service provider who bought the database and sold access item to your library). So you took your request to a librarian who used a vendor such as Dialog to search available reference databases. By the early 1980s, some reference databases were available on CD-ROM that a library acquired from a vendor such as Silver Plater. By the 1990s, electronic versions of many databases became available online, with libraries subscribing to vendor aggregators such as EBSCO, Ovid or ProQuest." *Ibidem*.

15. "Retrieval systems such as Dialog are capable of finding any natural-language terms of interest in any or all fields." Harris M. Cooper, Larry V. Hedges and Jeff C. Valentine, *The Handbook of Research Synthesis and Meta-Analysis*, *op.cit.*, *63.*

16. "Baud [...] refers to the data transmission speed of a modem." P.K. Singh, *Introduction to Computer Networks* (New Delhi: F.K. Publications, 2010) 231.

17. *Crime Scene Investigation*

18. Ken Follett, *On Wings of Eagles* (New York, NY: William Morrow & Co, 1984) 444.

19. "A maverick Texas billionaire and political populist, H. Ross Perot was a third-party presidential candidate in the 1992 and 1996 elections." Roger Chapman, *Culture Wars: An Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints, and Voices*, Volume 1 (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2010) 724.

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